



ETHNOGRAPHY AND TULU CINEMA: A CASE STUDY OF THE FILM 'KANCHILDA BALE'

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ABSTRACT

Tulu film industry is a part of Indian Cinema. Tulu film Industry also called as Coastalwood. It has an illustrious relationship with Kannada film industry. But cinema entered to Tulu only in 1970's. The first film being *Enna Thangadi* released in 1971. It produces 5 to 7 films annually. Though Tulu has a limited market, it has created its own mark in the regional film history by producing about 60 films in 45 years. Ethnographic film is the dominant interest and practice among visual anthropologists. There is no standard agreed-upon definition of the genre, and the popular assumption is that it is a documentary about “exotic” people, thereby broadening the term “ethnographic” to stand for any statement about culture. Some scholars argue that all film is ethnographic. The most important attribute of ethnographic film is the degree to which it is informed by ethnographic understanding. Ethnography is the systematic study of people and culture. To define “Ethnographic film is film that reflects ethnographic understanding”. There are few ethnographic films in Tulu language. In this context a study will be conducted to explore the ethnographic aspects in the film *Kanchilda Bale* which was released in the year 2011. The main objective of this study is to find out how closely film can approach the highest standards and goals of the ethnography. For this study primary data was collected through qualitative content analysis of the film *Kanchilda Bale*. The secondary data was collected from research books, articles and websites.

KEY WORDS: Ethnography, Tulu, Cinema.

Introduction

Tulu film industry is a part of Indian Cinema. Tulu film Industry is also called as *Coastalwood*. It has love and hate relationship with Kannada film industry. But cinema entered to Tulu only in the 1970's, the first film being 'Enna Thangadi' released in 1971. It produces five to seven films annually. Though Tulu has a limited market, it has created its own mark in the regional film history by producing about sixty seven films in forty five years (Sathish Kumar, 2015). Ethnographic film is the dominant interest and practice among visual anthropologists. There is no standard agreed-upon definition of the genre, and the popular assumption is that it is a documentary about “exotic” people, thereby broadening the term “ethnographic” to stand for any statement about culture. Some scholars argue that all films are ethnographic. There are so many arguments made by many scholars regarding 'ethnographic film' as a film genre. May be because of that, ethnographic film is still considered as undefined genre. Tulu film makers are trying to portray the culture of the Tulu region in many films and *Kanchilda Baale* is one among them.

Kanchilda Baale which means, a solemn promised child or blessed child is an Indian Tulu ethnographic film with English sub-titles. This movie is directed and produced by Kumbra Raghunatha Rai under the banner of Kaala Bhairava creations Bengaluru. The cast of the film are Pradeep Chandra, Manasi, D.S.Bollooru, Sudheer Raj Kateel, Muttappa Rai, Charithra Hegde, Naveen D. Padil, Aravinda Bolar, Shakunthala Shetty (MLA) etc. On 31st December this movie received a 'U' certificate from censor board and simultaneously was released in theatres in Mangaluru, Udupi and Puttur. Shooting was done in the area of Mandarthi, Koteswara, Manipala Hasthashilpa, Mekkakatte Daivada Mane, Vandaru Kambalagadde Beedu, Ancient Barkur Temple, Brahmavara etc. The film was overall completed with INR 40 lakhs and it has received 10 lakhs subsidy from Government of Karnataka.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to find out how closely film can approach the highest standards and goals of the ethnograph

To understand the ethnographic aspects in the *Kanchilda Baale*.

To find out the coastal culture in the film *Kanchilda Baale*

To analyze the ethnographic aspects in this film

Methodology

Research design is a logical and systemic plan prepared for directing a research study. A descriptive design is used this study. It is concerned with detailed description of the phenomena, group or community (Rao and Kajekar, 2008). This study consist qualitative research approach.

To identify the ethnographic aspects, primary data was collected through qualitative content analysis of the film *Kanchilda Baale*. Further reviews and write ups of this film also considered in this study. The goal of the qualitative content analysis is to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to

provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting (Zhang and Wildemuth, n.d.). Secondary data was collected from books, DVD/VCD and websites.

Findings and analysis

Kanchilda Baale tells the story of conflict between superstitions, beliefs of people and highlights the *bhootharadhane* (spirit worship) of the Tulu region. This theme was well written and scripted by Krishnappa Uppuru and the shooting was completed in the month of November 2010. *Kanchilda Baale* has a beautiful song which explains the beauty of Tulunadu.

Manu is a doctor who lives in California, visits his mother along with his wife and daughter, in the ancestral house after several years. Ajamma (Manu's mother) tells Manu that she had promised to perform the *kanchil* ceremony if a girl was born to her son, but Manu dismisses it as a “blind belief”. She made the promise as her son and daughter-in-law did not have a child even after more than four years of marriage. Manu said that he would not allow his daughter to participate in the ceremony as he and his wife had deferred having a baby because she was still pursuing her studies for some years after they got married. In many ways, the film is about negotiating between tradition, modernity, faith, superstition and omnipresent caste. Manu's wife suggests that there is no harm in conducting the ceremony as it would please the old woman. Manu remained adamant by arguing that his daughter was not born because god willed it to happen. (Wiki, accessed on April 22, 2016).

This movie highlights the *bhoothardhane* along with other traditional folk art forms of Tulu region such as *yakshagana*, *kambala* and *maadira*.

This film brings out folk art form in the most creative way possible. *Yakshagana* a theatrical form of presenting mythological and historical stories is performed with music, dance and dialogues. The word *yakshgana* means the songs of the *demi-gods* (*yaksha* meaning *Demi-God*, and *gana* meaning song). The performers wear interesting and colorful costumes, and elaborate headgears. The stage design and unique rendering is similar to that of the western opera. It is believed to have originated in the coastal districts of Karnataka. The true representation of the poems enacted in these plays is attributed to have started during the *vaishnav bhakti* movement in the eleventh century. In 13th century, a sage named Narahari Thirtha started *dashavathara* performance in Udupi, which later developed into the *yakshagana* of today (JoladRotti, 2014).

This film also shows the most popular sport of a buffalo race in Tulunadu region conducted during summer season. Famously know as *kambala* Pair of buffaloes is made to run in a muddy water field and a winner will be chosen (Maneer, 2011). This yearly event is celebrated with much enthusiasm and fervor in most parts of Dakshina Kannada, including Mangaluru. The *kambala* festival season starts in November and lasts till March. The festival takes place among a crowd of enthusiastic onlookers and supporters. The atmosphere becomes taut with anticipation and excitement during the races. As each farmer frantically edges his buffaloes to race on the track and reach the finishing line at the earliest, the crowd cheers them. The races continue overnight. Different types of races are held at different

levels that lead up to a grand finale. The grand finale is generally held in the afternoon of the second day. The swiftest pair of buffaloes is declared the winner of the race and the farmer controlling those buffaloes is awarded the prize (JoladaRotti, 2015).

In this film *maadira* folk are depicted beautifully. *Maadira* is the dance of women belonging to the *bhootha* impersonator's community (nalke). During the rainy seasons the members of this community are free from their traditional profession of spirit-possession and dance. Hence the women go from house to house dancing and singing accompanied by the beating of the drum known as *tembere*. One woman sings and beats the drum while another woman, usually the younger one dances. The song usually describes the beauty of the woman and her love and marriage with a handsome man ("Udupi Pages", n.d.).

Kabita means a small piece of poetry usually sung during planting the paddy seedlings by the women folk. The main speaker sings this narrative poem and after each stanza the co-workers repeat the chorus or the main theme of the song. The content may sometimes be the narration of certain episodes or an incident or a humorous episode. It may also be a satire or a joke passed towards the master or the lord or a grand personality, or it may also be the story of an animal ("Udupi Pages", n.d.)

This film depicts and ends with the *bhootharadhane*. There is a *kanchil Seva* (golden service), attached to the religious and contracted Kind of worship that involves rites and offerings, even penance. In this film character Manu's family fulfills the *kanchil seva* to *daiva* (Holy Spirit).

Conclusion

Tulu ethnographic aspects are exclusively depicted in the film *Kanchilda Baale*. Film tells the story of conflict between superstitions, beliefs of Tulu people and highlights the *bhootharadhane* (spirit worship) of the Tulu region. Film explains the *kanchil seva* (golden service) attached to the religious and contracted Kind of worship that involves rites and offerings, even penance during *bhootharadhane*. And also film tries reflecting on the Tulu folk arts such as *yakshagana*, *kambala*, *maadira* etc. This film is one of the great experiments in Tulu film industry in order to promote Tulu ethnographic aspects. The industry still has a long way to go. However it's to be noticed that Tulu film industry is gradually growing in a slow pace. Recent development shows that Tulu industry is opening itself to experiments and improvements.

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